

# Downtown Avenues

A Tucson Department of Transportation Project Update

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The Tucson Department of Transportation (TDOT) will soon begin several projects to make Downtown easier to navigate, and more are on the way in the next few years to coincide with construction of key Río Nuevo



attractions. Some of the first projects on the list are realigning the Five Points intersection, constructing a new 4th Avenue Underpass, and converting parts of several Downtown streets from one-way to two-way traffic.

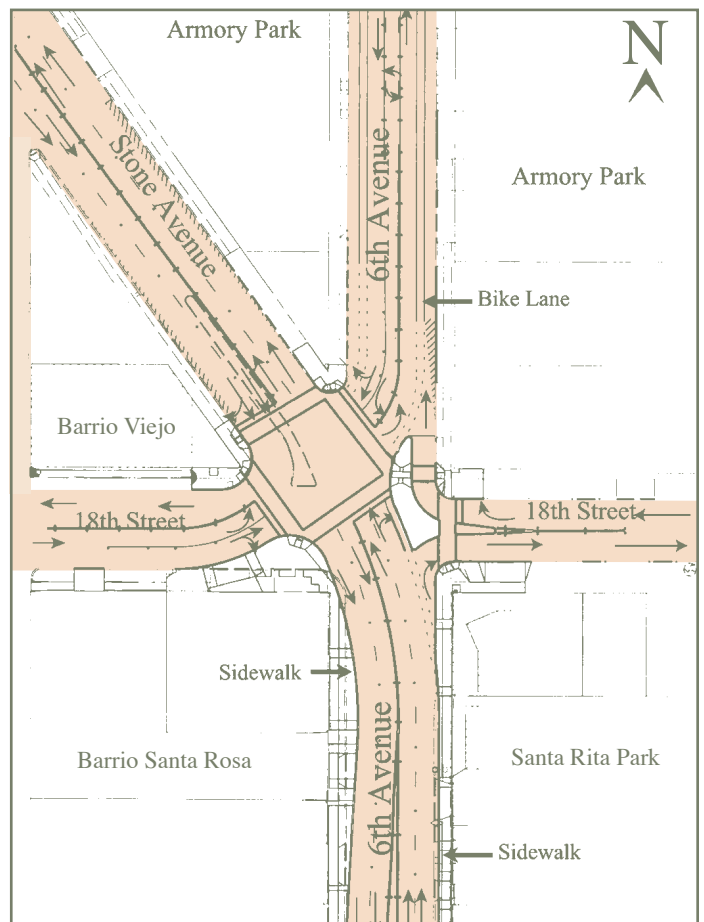
## Five Points Project Will Improve Intersection, Introduce Two-Way Traffic to Downtown

The intersection of South 6th Avenue, South Stone Avenue and 18th Street – a five-legged intersection commonly referred to as “Five Points” – is located at the southern edge of Downtown. In Spring 2005, the City of Tucson Department of Transportation (TDOT) will begin improving the intersection to make it more pedestrian-friendly with wider sidewalks, reconstructed crosswalks, and wheelchair ramps. Landscaping and decorative pavement will be installed to create a more attractive intersection that complements its historic surroundings and location as the southern gateway to Downtown Tucson.

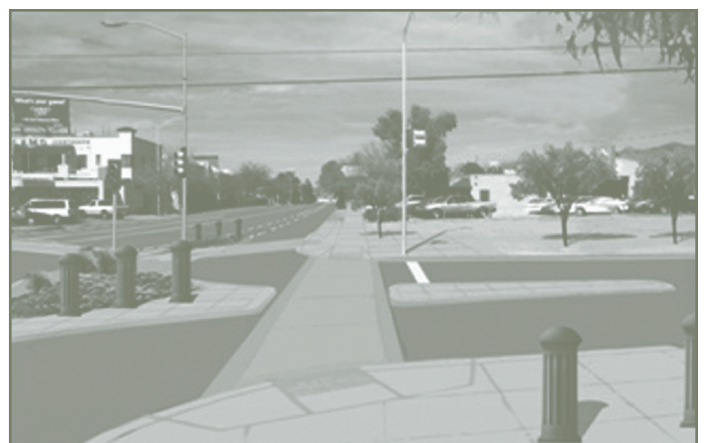
In addition, 6th Avenue (south of Broadway Boulevard) and Stone Avenue (south of Congress Street) will be converted back to two-way traffic as it operated in the early 1970's. TDOT project manager Kim McKay says the enhancements constructed as part of the Five Points Project will contribute to improved traffic circulation in the area, enhance walking and bicycling, and calm traffic in the nearby residential neighborhoods by discouraging cut-through vehicles. The project is consistent with the City's livability goals to create more pedestrian, transit, and bicycle friendly environments, and with the economic revitalization goals for Downtown Tucson.

When the project is complete, Stone Avenue will have two travel lanes in each direction and it will also have some on-street parking, with additional spaces provided on nearby side streets. North of 18th Street, 6th Avenue will have one travel lane in each direction and a center turn lane, including parking on both sides of the street and striped bike lanes. SunTran buses will continue to provide service on both avenues.

The public has been extensively involved in the development and planning of the Five Points Project through numerous meetings with surrounding neighborhood groups, adjacent businesses, historic committees and citizen advisory committees and three public open houses. A public open house will be held prior to construction which is expected to start in Spring 2005 (after the Gem & Mineral Show). Construction will take approximately seven months to complete and will cost approximately \$1.4 million. □



*Future design of Five Points Intersection.*



*Computer image of future improvements at Five Points.*

## New 4th Avenue Underpass Will Serve as Modern, Efficient Gateway to Downtown

Another important upcoming project is the realignment of 4th Avenue and the construction of a new underpass. Built in 1916, the historic underpass serves as the northern gateway to Downtown and links it to the 4th Avenue commercial district and University area. Traffic is routed by forcing it to merge immediately with westbound Congress Street or Toole Avenue, causing confusion for motorists and creating traffic bottlenecks

at busy times of day. Solving that problem is one of the goals of the realignment project.

The aging underpass also has structural issues that puts it at the top of TDOT's “to do” list. It floods during heavy rains and sports a façade that is badly deteriorating. The steep slope on the underpass' south end presents a problem for wheelchairs,

*See **New Underpass** on reverse side*



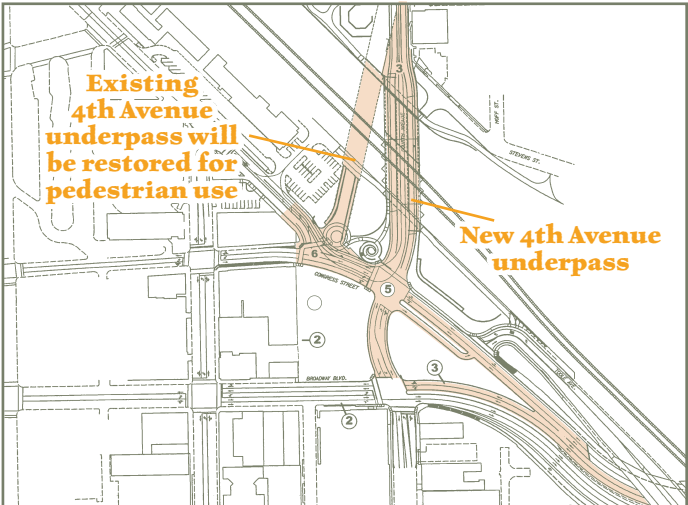
## New Underpass continued...

which keeps the structure from meeting accessibility standards handed down by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In a word, it's outdated.

As part of the realignment project, the old underpass, which is an official member of the National Register of Historic Places, will be completely restored and turned into a pedestrian-only walkway between 4th Avenue and Congress Street. Wheelchair access will be improved as much as possible on the existing underpass, given its design.


To carry vehicles and bikes, the new underpass will be built just to the east of the existing structure, on an undeveloped parcel of land left behind by the original project nearly 90 years ago. It will have two traffic lanes, bike lanes, ADA-compliant sidewalks and a route for the trolley. When the underpass project is complete, 4th Avenue will extend all the way to Broadway Boulevard and the intersection of 4th Avenue and Congress Street will be entirely rebuilt.

"The new underpass will be ready for use before we have to close the old one, meaning 4th Avenue will be open for most of the construction period," said Michael Graham, TDOT Public Information Officer. "The phasing of this project was carefully



Future design of the Fourth Avenue Underpass.

planned to cause minimal disturbance for the 4th Avenue and other downtown merchants, who were concerned about how this may affect them. I think almost everyone is happy with how the plans have taken shape," he added.

After the Greyhound Bus station is relocated and the existing building is demolished, the 4th Avenue Project will begin. The project's tentative start date is mid- 2005 and it is estimated that the project will cost approximately \$17 million. 

## Phasing Out One-Way Traffic on Downtown Streets

As part of the 4th Avenue Underpass Project, sections of Congress Street and Broadway Boulevard will be converted to two-way traffic. Broadway Boulevard will be converted from 4th Avenue to just west of Church Avenue. Congress Street will be converted between 4th and 5th Avenues and from Church Avenue to Stone Avenue. The remainder of Congress Street will be converted to two-way at a future time.


TDOT planned the phase out of one-way traffic in these areas – and the Mayor and Council approved it - as yet another way to make Downtown more pleasant and easier to navigate. Experts who specialize in Downtown revitalization recommended the change, and TDOT is completing a traffic study to guide its implementation.

"Allowing cars to travel in both directions will encourage 'destination' traffic, that is people coming to Downtown for a purpose, instead of motorists just passing through," says TDOT's Director, Jim Glock. "We see that as an important ingredient in the recipe for Downtown revitalization."

"Although many Tucsonans won't remember it, the two-way conversion project is actually a return to the Downtown of 40 years ago. That's when Tucson and many other cities began switching to one-way streets to increase

carrying capacity and move traffic through Downtown more quickly," Glock said.

But what many Downtown planners have discovered, Tucson included, is that efficiently moving people through the city center isn't necessarily a good thing if your goal is to bring them here to shop, eat, work and play. The increased carrying capacity of one-way streets makes them attractive to commuters but it restricts local business access and discourages pedestrian traffic. One-way streets are also confusing for motorists, enough even to keep them from coming Downtown in the first place.

"It's a tradeoff," says Brooks Keenan, TDOT's engineering manager. "Our engineering models predict a 15 percent reduction in carrying capacity once we allow traffic to move in both directions. That means traffic will be slower, but in this case that's good because the streets will be less like freeways and more like Downtown streets," he said. "But the slower traffic shouldn't lead to excessive congestion because pass-through traffic will naturally migrate to faster streets like Speedway Boulevard, 22nd Street, 6th Street, and Euclid Avenue." 

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